

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: COLUMBA BIGNO, retired plantation worker, housewife
DIONISIO BIGNO, retired plantation worker

Columba Bigno, Visayan, was born on September 17, 1905 in Naga, Cebu, one of seven children of Carnoto and Carlota Deboke Ariason.

As a child, she went to school for two years and served as an attendant for well-to-do relatives in Manila for several years.

Dionisio Bigno was born on October 9, 1891 in Dumanjug, Cebu, one of 10 children of Mateo and Inosencia Cabaes Bigno.

He worked as a carriage driver until he married Columba in 1921 and was blacklisted by his rich employer.

The Bignos immigrated to Hawaii in January, 1922 and worked at Makaweli Plantation, Camp 2. They did not join the strike in 1924 despite pressure from other workers.

They moved to Kaumakani in 1940 and raised six children. Dionisio retired in 1956. They are Catholic and continue to live in Kaumakani.

NOTES FROM UNRECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Columba Bigno

September 10, 1978

Kaumakani, Kauai

BY: Chad Taniguchi

These are notes from an unrecorded interview with Mrs. Columba Bigno at her home in Kaumakani, September 10, 1978. Mrs. Fuertes and her two grandchildren were present. Mr. Dionisio Bigno appeared at the end of the interview.

Mrs. Bigno came to Hawaii in January, 1922, with her husband whom she had married in August, 1921, in Cebu. In 1924, her child Iping was born. They lived at Camp 2.

Camp 2 Visayans had not been on strike but were going to join the strike the next day, because the strikers had been saying that the Camp 2 Visayans would be killed if they didn't join the strike.

She had never heard of a strike in the Philippines, where her family worked on their own land to provide enough food to eat and sold extra crops to get some money. They planted rice, corn, tobacco and harvested copra. There were no companies, only individual famers. She did not understand what a strike meant.

During the strike, she said that donations were not collected from her because they were "new man" and had a baby. She also suggested that Camp 2 was far away and people might be captured by police if they tried to deliver donations.

She recalls pretty distinctly that the shooting happened on Saturday. She heard the shooting from Camp 2. Camp 2 Visayans did not go on strike because the shooting occurred.

She said that a lot of men did not have wives then and went to get widows at the courthouse to make their wives, some with over two children, some pregnant.

Tape No. 5-37-1-78 and 5-38-1-78, TR1 and TR2

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Columba Bigno (CB)

December 5, 1978

Kaumakani, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG) and Chad Taniguchi (CT)

EG: [This is Mrs. Columba Bigno. As the tape begins, she's talking about her childhood.]

CB: I have a relative who married a Turk. [Refers to someone from the Middle East, not necessarily from Turkey. And usually, in the Philippines, they're businessmen. So one of her relatives married somebody like that who was in business.] And so, in my early years, I was going back and forth, between the home of this businessman and his wife, and also the home of my own mother. While I was living at the home of my relative who was in business, I myself learned a lot about the buy and sell trade; particularly, how to buy things very cheaply. And then, outside of those times, I was also going to school. I had a private tutor who was teaching me about reading and writing.

When I was 15 years I moved from Cebu to Manila with my relative who had married this Turk. And we had plans to go from Manila, back to the home country of this man. But at the time, there was a world war going on; it was 1918, 1919. And so we remained in Manila, doing business until there would be time for us to go back. I was there in Manila for two years. And the Turkish family was in big business. And they had business in Japan and Australia and other countries. What they were involved in was the buying and selling of a type of resin that came from trees. So we all were a part of the household and so when it came time to move from Cebu to Manila, the whole household came along. Maids and relatives and everybody. The father of the man, who was also a Turk, would not agree that they could come back, because it was a war time and very dangerous. But they intended to take the whole household with them back to the Middle East. And then, in 1921, after two years in Manila--because we never did leave for the Middle East--we went back to Cebu.

When we went back to Cebu we picked up a car in Manila, for our own use. And so we began looking for a driver for our car. There was a man on board the ship who was a driver of a car up in Manila.

And he was on his way back home again, to Cebu, to visit his family. This is the man who was destined to become my husband, and also the driver of that car that we were taking back. So he presented himself to the family and said that he was a driver, capable of driving and willing to drive them. So the conditions were that he would get free room and board, and also 30 pesos a month. A peso at that time was worth---two pesos were worth \$1, and so he was getting \$15 a month.

He said he didn't want to take the job because the salary was too low and he couldn't survive on it. I was 16 at this time. Mr. Bigno, at this time, wanted to court me. My mother, who was living in Cebu, my own family wanted me to go back to my own family, rather than this relative who had married into the Turk's family. My mother came to know this Dionisio Bigno who was courting me and my mother liked him very much. She said, "Because he's a skillful man and he knows how to drive. He's a good workman; he'll never go hungry. You should really marry him, because he wants to marry you."

This Turk is married to my older sister, so that's the house I was staying in. And when my older sister found out that I was planning to marry the driver, she went crazy. She just said, "Absolutely not. That's marrying below your station." So they fired him, and not only did he fire him as a driver but they tried to ruin his chances of ever getting a job with anybody else. There was some kind of a word out, or announcement that if he applies for a job not to give him work. So I continued staying at the house of my older sister, and they seemed to have successfully--at least for the time being--blocked my marriage to Mr. Bigno, the driver.

Eventually, I married him. And because he couldn't find any work, and because everybody was against us because of the marriage, that's how we came to Hawaii.

Since we arrived in 1922, up until the present time, we only were assigned to one plantation on Kauai. When my husband first arrived in 1922, he was working for 85 cents a day. He started working 6 o'clock in the morning; worked till 4 o'clock in the afternoon. His work was to hanawai the sugar plants. He was working on a contract basis. He had to do a certain amount in order to be able to get that money. I began having children one after another also, and we couldn't survive on his salary. I had six children, but one of them died. This one died at three years and three months, in 1931. She died of pneumonia.

EG: Do you remember the beginnings of the problems of the laborers, way back in 1924?

CB: Way back in 1924, there were some of the workers who had to walk everywhere. To their house, to the fields. But there also some of the workers who were able to ride on a train to their work, and

back again. But women who were doing this kalai work, they always had to walk. I myself worked on the plantation for eight years. 1934, I worked at kalai for 75 cents. From 6 o'clock in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. I would go with my companion to the work place where we were assigned. I was working there in the fields even carrying cane for about eight years. But my back was very sore. Very heavy work.

EG: Was there some talk in 1924 about the possibility of having a higher salary?

CB: They wanted to get a higher salary. Nobody knew what strike was about, but the news started getting around. There's the possibility of getting a higher salary if you do this thing they called "strike." Ligot was the leader of the union. So everybody wanted to join the strike.

EG: How about yourselves, on your own plantation, what was your opinion?

CB: For myself, I had no idea what a strike was all about. [People living in] Camp 4 already went down to Hanapepe. But I was pregnant already with my child. I was asking everybody, "Where are you going?"

They said, "We're all going down to Hanapepe because we're going to get a larger salary. As long as everybody goes to Hanapepe."

I was asking myself, "What can I do about this? I'm very pregnant." I was asking everybody, "Is there a place to live there in Hanapepe? Are there houses?"

They said, "Yeah, there are."

I was asking everybody, "What kind of work are we going to do there in Hanapepe?"

They were saying, "There's no work to be done there in Hanapepe. The women will do what they were always doing. They'll be cooking and washing. And the men, they'll strike."

I didn't go, and my husband didn't go either.

Camp 4 went down to Hanapepe, and then they were followed later by Camp 2. I think it was maybe a Saturday when I got the news. The news travelled very quickly that they were shooting one another down there in Hanapepe. And the police were on horseback, and there weren't cars yet, at that time. And there was the police up there on top of the hill and they were shooting down on the strikers. And many died. There were seven or eight there in Camp 4 who were sent home by the police. Wives who were sent home. And that's where I learned everything.

We were living there in Camp 2, and very few of us were included. Maybe some of the guards were included; maybe they were guards in the strike camp. But we heard the news about what happened there. We were all living in different places. The Filipinos lived together, the Japanese lived in another place in Camp 2. Filipinos were living down below. They were right near the sugar cane fields.

EG: Did any of you have plans that someday you would also be included in the strike?

CB: I don't know about the others, but for me, no. I have a cousin who's in the plantation of Robinson. If things got really serious, I was planning to go there. "If everybody else goes on strike you will be gotten. We'll come and get you and bring you to our place, so that you can have your child in peace." At the time of the strike I was pregnant with my second child.

EG: Are there any friends or relatives of yours who were killed in the thing that happened at Hanapepe?

CB: Not relatives, or maybe not even friends. But people who I knew. All my companions, when I was working there on the plantation in Makaweli, were Visayans. There were some whose husbands died. For those women, there was no difficulty in finding a husband after their husbands had been killed, because there were so many men who didn't have wives at that time. Even the court was willing to help them out, to find another husband for themselves. There were even some men who were sent back to the Philippines, and their wives may have remained here.

EG: How about yourself? What is your personal opinion about the strike? Was it a good thing?

CB: As far as I'm concerned, it seems like it was useless. You know, a strike is a very difficult thing. If you have no money there's no way of even buying things on credit. Even to get food.

EG: But were you actually invited to join in the strike?

CB: Oh yes, we were. We had invitations to join. We were told all to go down to Hanapepe because our salary would be increased.

EG: Who was it that invited you?

CB: The one who invited us is dead already. I guess he was a leader. His name was Insut. He was a Visayan. I forget, I don't know what his last name was. They called him Insut. He had no work himself; he was a gambler who was there in Hanapepe. He probably was the leader of the strike. He was probably told by the big leaders to go around and invite people to join the strike.

- EG: So are you saying that Insut went to Camp 2 to invite everybody to join in the strike?
- CB: No, no; he didn't go there. Nobody from there was going to strike, especially the Japanese. He probably went to Camp 4. Camp 2 was very far away; Camp 4 was close. [It seems like they just went around and they said,] "Hey, if you go out on strike, you'll be given a really big salary." That was their appeal. Yeah, it was like a gamble. If we win the strike then we'll be able to get a higher salary.
- EG: How did you feel? Most of the strikers were Visayans. Did you feel like, since they were Visayans and you were Visayan also, that you should join?
- CB: Yeah, we were all Visayan at that time. I don't think I even saw an Ilocano.
- EG: This Insut, is he still alive, or do you know where he is?
- CB: No. As far as I heard, he died. He himself never said that it's better if you strike, but I knew him because of gambling.
- EG: Where did you get the invitation, then, to go out on strike?
- CB: Well, the word was around that if the people from Camp 2 did not come down and join the strike camp at Hanapepe, they would be warred against. They would wage war against them.
- EG: Who's going to wage war against the people of Camp 2?
- CB: The people who are out on strike. That's what they're saying; if we didn't join in the strike, they would kill us all. There were people who were living right along the edge of the sugar cane fields--Visayans--who, when they heard this kind of news, they moved their houses up above in Camp 2. They started living up on top of the hill, because they were afraid the strikers would come and kill them all.
- EG: Who was it that said to you, "If you don't join the strike, they are going to kill you?"
- CB: Well, it was a Visayan. Of course, he's not here anymore; he was sent back to the Philippines.
- EG: He was a leader of the strike?
- CB: Yeah, but not in our camp. He was from outside. That's really what he said, if we don't join, then he's going to wage war against us.
- EG: You don't remember his name?

CB: No.

EG: [When it was said], "If you don't join in the strike, we're going to kill you," is that just for you personally, or for all the Visayans?

CB: Oh, I'm sure it was for all the Visayans.

EG: It was nothing like that for the Japanese?

CB: No. The Japanese didn't like to join the strike.

CT: That man told you [that he's going to kill you]?

CB: No. Only I hear, that one. The strike, suppose Camp 2 no go down the strikers down Hanapepe come up. Come up over here.

EG: Were you afraid?

CB: I was very young; I wasn't even 17 years old yet. I was 17 years old and quite young, and I wasn't afraid to go out of the house. After I gave birth to my child, I wasn't afraid to go up to the mountains by myself.

EG: But you didn't end up going to the home of your relatives because of the strike?

CB: No, I did not.

EG: What was the opinion of your neighbors and friends; were they thinking of joining in the strike?

CB: My neighbors weren't talking with me, or we weren't discussing among ourselves about the strike. The neighbors and myself, we were not discussing about whether we should join in the strike or not. We just were not in favor. I also had a (half) brother there in Camp 2, and they also didn't join in the strike.

People were saying, "Don't go to Hanapepe because even the strikers have put some people in jail." I heard about some Ilocanos who were caught by the strikers and then put in jail. So they were caught by the strikers, and that's what brought the police, to try and get the Ilocanos out of there. That was the beginning of the trouble. So the Waimea police came. The police went to investigate what had happened with the two people, and the strikers were unwilling to give up the two Ilocanos that they had captured. That's why there were a lot of police who were there. And you know how it is with Filipinos; Filipinos have hot heads, and so they used some of the weapons that they had and that was it. All the police who went there to rescue the Ilocanos, they were all Hawaiians.

EG: But you yourselves, you had nothing at all to do with that?

CB: No. We weren't included in that because we didn't go into the strike camp in the first place.

EG: Was your husband afraid because of these threats?

CB: He never said anything at all about the strike. He never even asked me, like, "Should we go out on strike, or shouldn't we." We never even talked about it. No bother. He no bother. Only go work.

....No, not taxi. No more taxi, before. Only businessmen get car, before. Camp 2, only get one car. The (Mati-san), the store.

CT: Oh, had store?

CB: Get store. Japanese store. Plantation get a store too, but I don't know, I no see that car. No more car. The plantation get a store, that working by over there. Kanaka too. But one Japanese and one haole store. Plantation, another one, managed by a haole, a Portuguese. Mati-san owned a store. And then, the [storekeeper] died, it was taken over by this Nada. This one is the son who owns Thrifty Mart. The father make. Make, 1946, I think. I don't know what year make, the father.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

CB:No more doctor. Me, no go doctor. Even one time. All my children.

CT: Was there a Filipino midwife who was around?

CB: No more. I no believe that one because only hilot, hilot. You know that Portuguese, she smart. She smart. Only the first, my baby, I don't know yet the Portuguese, eh, because new one, me over here. I don't know the lady. That's why, little more, I like hemo I no can because me, I don't know, the baby, where place go out. Me no sabe because me, small time, me no look the wahine got hemo baby. That's why, I don't know. I no can stand up already. Too much sore, my stomach, too much big, too much sore. I no talk my husband, I no talk my sister, my sister-in-law, I no talk. Then, 1 o'clock, from morning time I no eat because I remember too much sore my stomach, eh. I no can. I no talk. My stomach sore.

And then, my husband sleep, he patai, eh, from the work. And then, he said, "What you doing?"

"I don't know. Too much blood, I don't know. I don't know, the baby or what. I don't know how come too much blood."

They call my sister-in-law. "Ai, little more hemo baby." They put me the ground, on the mat. Pillow.

"Go hapai this Francisco." The Visaya old man.

Bumbai, come. "Aiyaa, no can, though. This one, the baby, he make all same. Crooked, the baby." Hard, hilot, hilot. Me, no can talk already. Little more, me died already; make. "More better call the doctor, go the Mr. Masta [possibly Meister], the boss, the camp. Call German." Almost hemo baby, like the doctor. The doctor come about 2 o'clock, nighttime.

The doctor, hoo me, too much scared the doctor. And then he say, "You, number one baby, or what? Okay, you fellows go get out of here. The husband and this lady---your mother?"

"No, no, my sister-in-law."

"Your husband stay over there." Bumbai, he go injection me, no, one time, the baby come. Okay. "This one, this baby, from yesterday like come look the world. But you hold 'em, you no talk nothing. You only keep 'em. The baby, from yesterday come. Big boy. Tomorrow, the Filipino nurse come." He give me for clothes the baby, no. The small clothes. And give medicine for me da kine, make hana pa'a. Pau, all pain already.

Because the Portuguese, I no make lady, that's why, before. No more nothing. No more hilot before. The injection, quick pau.

CT: That was the plantation doctor?

CB: Plantation, that one. The doctor, Dr. Dunn. I remember Dr. Dunn. Big man. Go open the door, the room, "This baby?" I tell him. "Okay."

The neighbor over there all pile, eh. "Get up, get up. Go outside, you fellow. The husband he stop."

Quick, no more five minutes, the baby come.

CT: Did you have to pay for that? Or free?

CB: No. Free. Plantation, eh?

CT: Then the next baby, the Portuguese lady help you out?

CB: Yeah, Portuguese other one. The time I go hospital, free too, all kind. The contract, free medical, free the house, free the water, free the coal--because give coal before, for fire. And kerosene. Free everything. Everything, the house free. The house no pay, no more nothing.

CT: When Mrs. Santos helped you with your baby...

CB: No, I no pay. No, only da kine baptize the baby. Because before time, me, suppose I get baby, quick I malama pig. Before, I buy a small pig, that only \$5. I take care the baby pig. Bumbai, I hemo baby, I kill the pig, make baptize time. Half, I give Mrs. Santos. Yeah. It's true, though, half, I give 'em.

CT: Who told you that she is good?

CB: Because my neighbor. I don't know. Because my neighbor old-timer over there. "Oh, see Mrs. Santos (we used to call her Mama) can [deliver] da kine, the baby. No need go hospital."

Francisco Cabado, that old man Filipino is smart too, but is not supposed da kine the baby. No more inside, eh, he straight or what. Smart can cut. Cut any kind. He can wash the baby. But this Mrs. Santos, the old lady, make the basin for you pretty. Diaper the baby, she go wash 'em. I give money, "No." That's why, I pay da kine.

CT: She no like money?

CB: No. Sometimes she give me what kind kaukau them.

CT: What kind kaukau?

CB: Hamburger, you know, cut the macaroni. Make like that. Macaroni, because big family. She married again, she married old man, Filipino. She married, but make, the husband go away. Plenty children, you know. Plenty boy, go hanahana field.

CT: That woman, Mrs. Santos, she work at the plantation?

CB: No. I come here, the big daughter married, all same my age. She married Filipino too. All kompang together. Now, alive yet, this....she stay Honolulu. Isabelle. Before, her husband.... Filipino, I forget....Domdoma. Fortunato Domdoma, the husband before. But make. She married again, another one, go Honolulu.

CT: What year your first baby?

CB: 1922. Because I come here, my stomach, I carry the baby about.... I reach over here, three months inside my stomach. About May 26, and then my first baby come. 1922.

CT: When you and your husband were here, did you folks send money back home to the Philippines?

CB: How can? No more. Every time, pay day time, my husband go pay day, hapai only envelope. No 'nough the store because every time charge, eh, kaukau one day, hanahana one day. Twenty dollar one month. No can, no?

CT: So no can send money to Philippines, then?

CB: Yeah, no can. That's why, lucky now, big pay day. Good, the working now. The labor. Afternoon, pau hana, after work, he go deliver him home to the house. But me, before, not. Before, the old-timer, no more hour-hour before, hanahana. No more by hour work. Before, suppose by hour, I think 10 cents, though. Because if \$1; 6:00 until 4:00, what that? Ten hour, eh? Ten hour hanahana. Yeah, \$1. Ten cents. Now, one hour, \$5, though. No more grade before. Now, grade 1, because my number one boy supervisor, that's why sabe. He go bring the people working place. Pau hana time, he bring the...."you know Ma, one hour now, how much? How much one hour now? Near \$5." Oh boy, \$5, one month already, that one, hanahana before. (Laughs)

Me boy before, 14 years old--number one boy--the boss, before, he like take my boy because he go check up the school. Is pretty good head, no?

"No, no, no." Because I know the boy only 10 hour hanahana, only half dollar. "No." He [the boss] like inside field, mark the cane. The car had, eh, hapai ko car. Go mark the number, all the working guy. Only mark. "No, no, no. Me boy like the school."

"No, the school nothing. For what?" [said the boss].

"Me boy, this year grammar school pau. No, like go school, I don't know what kind school like."

"No, no. High school nothing. No more job, bumbai. No, more better hanahana. I give \$1 one day, even too much young. Only 14 years old, I give \$1."

"No, but vacation, that one. Like go high school." The brother go school, too. Because I get three [children] in school.

"No, bumbai, school, no more job. More better hanahana. More experience. More good experience, that one."

And then, I tell 'em. I tell my boy, "You work. But this funny kind. Now vacation, he give you \$1, only mark the car."

"Okay." Two guys. One Portuguese, Makaweli, and one him. All same age. Go mark. And then, he take the cane. Go mark the cane, eh. "Ah, I like the school." The boss speak, "No go school, no need. You, good hanahana man." And then, bumbai the boy paid \$1. Yeah, \$1 one day. He show to me. "Here Mama, my pay."

Bumbai, January time, open the school, he give tax. Five dollar tax. And then, the bookkeeper every time go pay. "What's the matter? My boy no more 18 years. What's the matter, you take the tax?"

"Yeah, because men, the work."

"No allowed. No good. No more the age, the boy. More better take out."

Bumbai, go Makaweli, I go the boss. Talk the boss. "Take out the tax."

"No, come back, the tax."

Because \$5 before, he pay the tax. Five dollar tax, one year. Hanahana men. He take out the pay day, eh. "No, the boy no more 18. Philippine Island, 18, though. What's the matter, over here? Even no more age?"

"The pay, that's why. One dollar one day."

"But you fellow tell, 'I give 'em the \$1 one day.' Because my boy no like but I give \$1 one day."

"Oh. Okay, bumbai I tell the manager." Bumbai, he come back. The \$5.

And the boy, he speak, "Okay, I no go school but my brother, I like him go the school." He get two brother and the daughter, too, no. One daughter.

CT: So the first boy didn't...

CB: No more go high school. And then, now get the married already, get the children. The children all go high school, all go Honolulu college. And he go school again. He take diploma. Yeah. Night-time school. He speak, "I go school."

CT: Who told him to go work?

CB: The boss, Hawaiian Sugar. He give me the boy for mark boy. Because he check up the school work. The head, eh.

CT: What was his name, that time, the manager?

CB: We call 'em, "Baldwin." Douglas, before.

CT: He lived up there before [pointing toward Waimea, mauka]?

CB: Yeah, he live up there before. In the big house. All the manager senior citizens now. All, he stop over there now. I think.

CT: After you had your first baby, then second baby, you said you didn't have enough money.

CB: No more. No more money.

CT: What were you going to do?

CB: That's why I go work before. I work, 1934. I work because my children all like go school. Because in school already. That's why, if I hapai, I get my money, I give the kid \$1, each one, for lunch. One month. Five cents, eh, the lunch.

"This one, your lunch." "This one, your lunch." I trust my boy, eh. "Give the teacher this one for your lunch." How many boy? Five boys. But one boy no more the school.

[Visitor arrives,. Taping stops, then resumes.]

CT: What is your name?

CB: Whole name? Columba.

CT: What is your address over here? Post office box?

CB: My address, post office? My number 94.

CT: And when were you born?

CB: I born 1905. The month, September 17.

CT: And where were you born?

CB: Philippines. Cebu. Province Naga.

CT: And today your citizenship is what?

CB: Philippines. American no can. No need, eh. My children, that's all. But me, I don't....

CT: Did you have sisters and brothers?

CB: Me? I get plenty, but all dead.

EG: How many are they?

CB: Seven brothers and sisters.

CT: Any of them came to Hawaii? One brother?

CB: Two, Hawaii. But all dead, no.

CT: The other three stayed in the Philippines?

CB: Philippines. Dead, too.

CT: And when did you get married?

CB: 1921.

CT: And your husband's name is?

CB: Dionisio Bigno.

CT: What was your name before you got married?

CB: Aliason.

CT: What about your children's names?

CB: Number one boy, Felipe. Number two, Marcelino. Number three, Victor. Number four, Anastacio; number five, Alejandro. The girl, Delfin number six, eh.

CT: And the first one is hospital, and the other five is Mrs. Santos?

CB: Yeah. All Mrs. Santos.

EG: You also speak Tagalog?

CB: That's right. That's because I lived in Manila, as I explained earlier.

CT: Where did you live, small time?

CB: My mother; but about 10 years old, I go to my mother's cousin. I go over there. Bumbai, about I got 15 years old, I go my mother again. My father make, that's why. And then, my cousin, he go take me because she got the daughter married the big shot man Cebu City. That's why, like company. Only, he teach me how to write the name, how to go buy, shopping, like that. From 10 until 15. Five year, I live over there, the time.

CT: How far away from Naga is Cebu City?

CB: Thirty miles.

CT: How often did you go home during that time?

CB: Get train. Every time, the train. Morning time got, 11 o'clock got, 1 o'clock got, and afternoon the last train. From Cebu and Argao. And then come back again.

CT: Did you go home every day?

CB: No. Only one week one time. I no go home every day. Every week. Every Saturday we go home.

CT: Were you going to school that time?

CB: Only the house. The teacher come nighttime. Get plenty working lady, girl. And then go teach how write, how the name. You know

what kind the teacher, that one? Catholic teacher. Filipino lady. Language Visaya. Catholic teacher. Old lady come. Not English school. That's why, I can take the American citizen but I don't know what kind talk. No good, eh?

"How come, Manang, you never go American citizen?"

"Too much good a time, that's why." (Laughs) "That's why, hilahila, though. Suppose no more pass."

CT: From 1920, you went back to Naga?

CB: Too far, Naga to Cebu. Every week I go home.

CT: After the five years...

CB: Yeah, I go back. Because my mother like me stay already. She no like because me big girl. But my husband, he ask for marry to me. To my mother. That's why. No can find my husband job over there because my boss, the man too much strict. "No can. This man is no good. To marry my old employee, no good."

CT: He didn't want you to get married?

CB: Who? My mother like. My mother tell, "More better [you] marry this man because you no more father already. I no like you go back over there. You work over there already. You big girl already. You stay here."

"Up to you." I don't know that kind, eh. That's why, too young.

EG: Sixteen [years old].

CB: Not yet. [When I was] 16 I stay here already. I born already, my number one boy. Only 15, I think [when I got married].

EG: Your present husband, was he not the driver you were talking about before, for the car that you brought back from Manila?

CB: I was living with one of my relatives who married this Indian guy, and he ran some kind of a store. And my husband was the driver. He was coming from Manila and we were on the boat together. He was only going home to visit because he's also Visayan.

CT: You lived in Manila for two years?

CB: Two years. I got 15 already, that one. I live Manila 1918. Bumbai, 1920 get war, eh. The German-American war, I think. That one, no can go Europe. He bring me Europe, like all the women. Got to take care the one baby, got the working lady. All go over there. But the father [told his son in] Manila. "You fellows, because the war is strong, you no can come." That's why, the

father of the boy [said], "No go home." Go Japan take care the business, and bumbai he call Manila, "More better come back Cebu because no can go Europe."

CT: Why did he want to go to Europe?

CB: No, he saw the wife. Vacation like. Because the father the boy, he ask for bring all over here. I like see the Filipino, because the wife not really Filipino. Half. The father is Spanish and the grandma, the mother of the father, the grandma--Filipina. But the father raised Spanish, eh. And then, got little bit Filipino, the girl. Married time, that's why, the grandmother, she tell my cousin, "More better this one, my girl married, more better I keep. I like go with them, this one. Bumbai come. Every week come home. Because company, she like go around. That's why, I live over there about five years."

CT: Did you like that?

CB: I no like go home already. Because the kaukau. And every afternoon get the kalesa, two horse [driven cart]. Open. Go over there kompang the senyora. The Mrs. go around the park every pau hana.

CT: You were companion for the Mrs., or for the girl?

CB: No, the Mrs. Bumbai, get girl already, get baby already. Get one girl take care. Babysitter. Only baby take care, that ma'lama. And get cook. All ladies, eh, inside house. All ladies. Only me young. Some 20 year old, some 40 year old. Only me the young one, kompang the Mrs. go holoholo daytime.

CT: The Mister, what was his job?

CB: Big business. Him business, big kind store. All the furniture, one store for the good kind from Japan clothes. The good kind material. Shoes. From Australia. That girl get one store. Two brothers work. Big business.

CT: What was the name?

CB: Jorge Yares. The brother, I don't know what name that one, because he call Senyor Sato, the big brother. Two brothers. All kompang. Get plenty employees, the store.

CT: So when you got married...

CB: Too much wild man. He no can because he like shoot my husband. And then my husband go over there. Because sabe. That's why my sister take me, go home already. Because my mother like me go home already. I say, "Okay, I go home." From Manila place.

That's why, "Big girl already. I no like you stay here."

But my boss no like. But no can do nothing. No can do nothing; I like go home.

CT: What did you want to do? Did you want to stay or did you want to go?

CB: I like. I pity too, eh. My nieces too because long time take care for me, too. But I love more my mother. More, my mother. And then married, he leave the mother too.

EG: You know, your life in Manila--from the way you described it--must have been quite nice because you were at least living with a family that was fairly wealthy. Then you came here to Hawaii in the 1920's, and it must have been very difficult. It must have been a kind of life that you weren't used to. What did you feel, when you came from that kind of a life in Manila to this kind of a life here in Hawaii?

CB: As they say in English, the best word is "regret." I really regret it. My life in the Philippines was like being a senyorita. I had shoes and I had an umbrella. The food was good. When I arrived here, wow, it was really a hard life. We were eating just sweet potatoes and kalamunggay.

EG: You've never returned to the Philippines, then?

CB: No, never. I have no more parents. All my brothers and sisters are also dead already. My cousin and wrote to me and said, "You're the only one who's still alive from your family."

END OF SIDE ONE

TAPE NO. 5-37-1-78 and 5-38-1-78, TR2; SIDE ONE

CB: Two brothers and two sisters I left behind in the Philippines, and they're all dead already.

EG: Maybe after a few years here in Hawaii you became accustomed to the kind of life, though?

CB: Sure, because after a short time I had my own children and I had my own family. It was also hard, though. I was kind of hoping that my own family might go to see the Philippines, because it's a lot cheaper to live there than it is here. Give them the fare to go there and let them vacation in the Philippines. But none of them have ever gone to the Philippines. I don't like to ride on an airplane but the kids could go.

CT: When you left the Philippines, how did you feel, as a young wife?

- CB: I don't know. All same nothing. Wife or, I don't know how take care the husband because too much young. And then, I come here already, and then I know. You cook, you wash clothes, you....the baby, more worse, I get baby. But suppose you get plenty baby, you sabe already. First baby, no, you don't know nothing. No more mother [to teach me], no more.
- CT: Did your husband want to come to Hawaii?
- CB: Oh yeah. He want to come because the people of Philippine Island come here and come back. Too much the gold, though. Takai no? "Too much money, though, Hawaii. Yeah, too much gold." Because before is just gold, eh. Gold, he pay. But I no see the gold.
- CT: Did you ever think of not coming and staying in the Philippines and let your husband go work, and then he come back to the Philippines.
- CB: I no da kine. Because I scared already, come home ride the boat. Because little more me die, eh, come here. Because I no can stand up already. All same I carry two month baby. And then, I sick. Too much sick. That's why, "Good-bye Philippines. I go down Honolulu. Maybe I no can see you already." He carry me go down the boat because I no can walk.
- CT: When did you come to Hawaii? What year?
- CB: 1922. January, 1922. I reach Honolulu, that one.
- CT: Did you leave from Manila?
- CB: From Manila? December 17, go ride boat.
- CT: What is your mother's name?
- CB: Carlotta.
- CT: Do you know what her name was before she got married?
- CB: Yeah, Deboke.
- CT: And your father's name?
- CB: Carnuto.
- CT: Do you remember your grandparents?
- CB: My grandparents, only I remember....yeah, my father side. Martina, the grandma; Sacarias, the grandpa.
- CT: And what about school in the Philippines?
- CB: Get that kind, before. Filipino school, eh. I went to school at the rectory, that kind of church school. For around two years.

CT: And what kind of job did you have in Hawaii? You worked for about 10 years, you said. What kind of work was that?

CB: Eight years, cut grass.

CT: That was 1933 to nineteen....

CB: Kalai, cut grass one year. Hapai, carry the cane; fire the cane, seven year.

CT: You work with your husband, together?

CB: No. Somebody. My husband, different job.

CT: How much did you get paid when you were piler?

CB: Sometimes \$1 over. Sometimes one day, \$1 over. I can sometimes, if no more rush, no more work, work, I can \$30 one month.

CT: How about the hapai ko man, how much he make?

CB: More little bit high. I don't know how much, but little bit.... more than the wahine, I think. Maybe \$40.

CT: Oh, not too much more.

CB: No, not too much.

CT: What is your religion?

CB: Catholic.

CT: Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?

CB: No, only Senior Citizens now. Senior Citizens is the retired, that's why.

CT: So you go to the Senior Citizens?

CB: Yeah, I go. No can every week, though. Only the Christmas party sometimes. But the Senior Citizens speak, "You come, I pick up you." Just like that little bit kaukau, no. I cook my own. I cook, I bring. Pot luck, yeah. And my husband, he go....sometimes one month no go, sometimes every week go. Because can walk, no.

CT: Mrs. Bigno, you have any hobbies?

CB: Ah, TV (Laughs). No can holoholo. More worse, no more car. I like TV. My hobby, TV. My son--number one son--he bring me this one because buy new one. I go, "What's that?"

"Phonograph, Mom. Good for you. You like sing, eh?"

"Leave 'em. The TV more better. I see the TV. Can see, the TV.
That one no more. Only music. Leave over there."

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 5-52-2-79 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Columba Bigno (CB) and Dionisio Bigno (DB)

May 22, 1979

Kaumakani, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG) and Chad Taniguchi (CT)

EG: We're at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bigno, and the day is Tuesday, the 22nd of May.

We're going to take the biographical data of Mr. Bigno.

Your name?

DB: Dionisio Bigno. Dionisio I. Bigno. That "I." is the name of my mother.

EG: When were you born?

DB: Eighteen ninety-one.

EG: What month and day?

DB: October. The ninth of October, I was born.

EG: Where were you born?

DB: I was born in Dumanjug, Cebu.

EG: Are you a United States citizen?

DB: No, I'm not. I'm a Filipino.

EG: How many were you in the family? How many kids?

DB: We were 10. I'm the only one who's still alive. All the rest are dead, including my parents. My mother died after we had the 10 children, and then my father got married again.

EG: When the two of you came here, you were already married?

DB: Yes, we were.

EG: You remember the name of your mother?

DB: Her name was Innosencia Cabales.

EG: Your father?

DB: Mateo Bigno.

EG: Do you remember the names of your grandparents?

DB: Ah, no. I cannot remember them. They're all dead already.

EG: Did you go to school?

DB: Yeah, I went for a short time in the public school there in Dumanjug.

EG: How long did you go to school?

DB: I went to school for two years.

EG: What was your work when you came here?

DB: When I first came, I worked in the sugar fields. I was at Camp 2. At that time when I was working on the plantation, the salary was 85¢ a day.

EG: What year was that?

DB: Nineteen twenty-two. If you cut a certain amount of cane, you would be given a bonus. But for myself, even though I would cut that amount of cane, I had so many debts, that it just used up the money to pay off the debts. It wasn't the money that I was thinking of. From 1923 to 1940, I worked there at Camp 2. Then after that, we moved here to Kaumakani because Camp 2 was plowed under. There's no one living there. From 1940 until the present time, I've been here in Kaumakani.

EG: What year did you retire?

DB: I retired in 1956. Since that time, I haven't been working, except here around the house.

EG: Are you able to live on the pension that you receive?

DB: You know, the pension that we receive is okay. But you have to be very careful and calculating in order to get by on that amount. You really have to calculate very carefully how your money will be used. If I bought everything that I wanted, then I wouldn't have anything, no money. Even 1 cent. You have to take it easy, but keep going.

EG: Where were you at the time of the strike?

DB: I was, naturally, in Camp 2. At that time, I would have liked to have gone to Hanapepe to join in the strike, but there were guards

who wouldn't allow you to go through at the road. So I never did go to Hanapepe.

EG: What did you feel when you heard about the strike?

DB: I was scared. Because if something happens to me, what would I do? I have a family to take care of.

EG: When you were still young, how was it that you met your wife?

DB: I was a driver for a wealthy family. At the time, I was around 30 years old, and my wife-to-be was around 15. Since we were both Visayans and from Cebu, I went to see her parents because I wanted to marry her. We got married to each other, but we didn't have to spend a lot of money because my parents were gone, and there wasn't that big of a crowd. We got married in Cebu. My wedding was almost like being on a picnic. I didn't have any money, myself, at that time. I didn't have very much money at that time, and so all we had money for was to have a small snack. It was in 1921 that we were married. Nineteen twenty-two, we were coming to Hawaii.

By the grace of God, we're both still alive even though our hair is gray. Nobody in her family seemed to mind too much that I was double her age. The mother was probably very happy to have her daughter marry someone who could take care of her. I'm also very happy that the mother didn't forbid me to marry her daughter. Even though my own parents were not alive--there's no one who gave me advice--I just went ahead and got married.

The boss kicked me out of the employ because I married this young woman. Everywhere where I went to find work, I couldn't get any. So the boss that I had been working for sent the word around that I should not be hired because I had stolen from him. I had taken away this woman, who now became my wife--Mrs. Bigno. After I married this young woman, the owner spread the word around that I was a thief because I had stolen her away and no one should hire me. And so I found it very difficult to find a job by which I could support myself and my wife. I'm reputed to have taken away his maid.

EG: How is it that you only came to get married when you were 30 years old?

DB: Well, there's a lot of reasons for that, but one of them would be that work was not so permanent. There was not much security.

END OF INTERVIEW

The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kauai

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

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